



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

For Release to PM's, MARCH 6, 1961

ADDRESS BY SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR STEWART L. UDALL AT TWENTY-SIXTH NORTH AMERICAN WILDLIFE AND NATURAL RESOURCES CONFERENCE, WASHINGTON, D. C., MARCH 6, 1961, 10:30 A.M., E.S.T.

I am very glad that you have given me this opportunity to address the General Session of this, the Twenty-Sixth North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference. I enjoy talking to people whose business is my business and whose interests are my interests, especially as we are about to share what I hope will prove to be some of the most far-reaching and productive years in the history of the conservation movement in this country.

The theme of this Conference, Planning for Population Pressures, is to me indicative of the breadth of purpose--and depth of understanding--of the Conference's sponsors and participants.

Not so long ago, as time is reckoned, our natural resources appeared so limitless that people were no problem at all. As recently as the middle of the last century the French observer, de Tocqueville, was able to write of "that continent which still presents, as it did in the primeval time, rivers that rise from never-failing sources, green and moist solitudes, and limitless fields which the plowshare of the husbandman has never turned. Such is the admirable position of the new world that man has no other enemy than himself."

But man did turn out to be his own worst enemy, and all too soon it became the conservationist's mission to protect and preserve our land, water, and wildlife from the barren consequences of man's conviction that he held a special place in creation and that the land and its creatures were expendable. The conservation movement has--to its good fortune--had great champions in its hours of greatest need. With almost providential timing--men of extraordinary vigor and vision have taken up the cause of conservation and made it their own. To the wise counsel of Gifford Pinchot, John Muir, the two Roosevelts and Harold Ickes--to name but a few--this generation owes a profound debt of gratitude. But more often than not their advice went unheeded.

Only four generations after de Tocqueville's visit to the "Primeval continent" much of our land lay eroded. Many of our once vast forests were harvested wantonly and our great rivers ran unharnessed--and polluted--to the sea. It was not until the Administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt that the full development of our land and water resources and the careful protection of perishable natural assets truly became major expressions of national policy.

But with the coming of World War II and troubled times abroad, the attention of the public and of succeeding administrations was largely diverted from our own land. The Department of the Interior--until that time a prime mover in national affairs--slowly settled into a rut of lackluster performance, content to let others shape the country and the ideas which guided it. It has now been more than twenty years since the United States has engaged in any massive and sustained national conservation effort. The broad programs initiated by Franklin Roosevelt--the Civilian Conservation Corps, reforestation of public lands, sustained soil and water conservation measures--have either been allowed to lapse or to drift along on the momentum of the past.

Yet it is precisely those same twenty years that have fundamentally changed what Thomas Jefferson called "the face and character" of our land. Hundreds of thousands have pushed out from the cities into the countryside--a movement that has inevitably created vast stretches of urban sprawl.

The talk today is of over-urbanization, exploding population, and vanishing countryside. And it would seem that this is only the beginning. Inevitably we, as managers of our natural resources, are faced with acute new responsibilities. We are today in a state of long-term crisis. Although we rarely concede the point, our modern industrial society depends for its survival on an equilibrium between man and nature. As Aldo Leopold, that most perceptive and eloquent conservation prophet, once said:

"Civilization is not the enslavement of a stable and constant earth. It is the state of mutual and interdependent cooperation between human animals, other animals, plants and soils, which may be disrupted at any moment by the failure of any one of them."

We have today a new dimension of urgency in the dependence of man on nature: I refer to the need for the human animal to recreate itself in nature. The necessity to meet the outdoor needs of our people now and in the future will in all likelihood be the sharpest and most consistent pressure on our land, water and forests in the years ahead.

The overriding mandate to conservationists today is to preserve the natural habitat of man--to preserve it against the onslaught of bulldozers, cement mixers and subdividers. Because no matter how seemingly industrialized and civilized man has become over the past two centuries, he is biologically and temperamentally rooted in the soil. To allow ourselves to be cut off from our relationship with the earth, from our relationship with mountains and lakes, forests and open places, might well cause a fundamental change in our national character.

Never before has the need for imaginative and truly national leadership been as great as it is today. On the one hand we have an almost insatiable and ever-growing population. On the other hand, a limited reservoir of land and its resources. In between, as arbiter so to speak, we have a large group of dedicated and highly trained men such as those of you here today. The need clearly is for leadership in the very highest places of our Government so that we might define

our objectives and proceed posthaste with meaningful planning--and action. It is therefore a matter of satisfaction that President Kennedy, in his Special Message to Congress on Natural Resources, has set forth a charter under which all of us can work with all the ingenuity, energy, intuition, and enthusiasm we can muster.

For, in my opinion, never before has a President of the United States given such a broad and comprehensive mandate to conservation policymakers. Particularly noteworthy is that section of the President's Message which deals with recreation. It is significant indeed that for the first time in history the recreation potential of our land and water has been put on a par with, say, the hydroelectric potential of our great rivers. Surely every conservationist who read the President's Message must have felt a quickening of his pulse at the vast opportunities which we can achieve under this broad Presidential charter. I think I can safely say that my associates and I at the Department of the Interior felt a surge of purpose and momentum. That very night we sat down and began to assemble our plans and programs, with the realization that now--for the first time--we could put together a truly national program for the wise development of our resources including the acquisition of still unspoiled land and water in every section of this country.

It is still too early to present here anything except a broad outline of the principles and objectives which will dominate the thinking of the new Administration.

We are first of all taking a hard new look at existing programs within the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Indian Bureau and the Bureau of Reclamation. We are, for example, reassessing the objectives of Mission 66. There has been some concern on the part of conservationists whether some of our national parks are not being overdeveloped at the expense of their unspoiled grandeur. We are giving these considerations attention, area by area.

As you know, the Administration has ordered an 18 month moratorium on the filing of nonmineral claims on our public domain. Among the advantages to be gained from this breathing spell is the opportunity to prepare an inventory of the recreational opportunities offered by the public domain to all. Those areas which offer exceptional opportunities must be made available, through proper development, to the men and women who own the land.

Perhaps no other outdoor sport has grown as much over the past decade as has boating and here Federal reservoirs offer opportunities which often did not exist before. The construction of Tiber Dam in Montana, for example, created Tiber Reservoir where on a typical Sunday 300 boats were counted and where on the opening day of the trout season 1,750 fishermen caught 5,000 Rainbow Trout. But in the past recreational values of Federal reservoirs have received altogether too little attention. It is our intention to prepare plans to fully utilize recreational opportunities of new and existing reservoirs and to seek appropriations for their development.

We are giving very careful study on how we can speed up the vital wetlands acquisition program in the Fish and Wildlife Service.

We have been charged by the President to formulate plans for new starts. Obviously, a national program of this kind does not mean the acquisition of new Federal parks and recreational areas only. Inevitably, and most importantly, such a program must include devices for encouraging the States to develop land acquisition programs of their own.

The need is for a balanced program of National and State parks--wildlife preserves and local recreation areas. Our great national parks represent one of the few remaining opportunities for the leisurely enjoyment and admiration of magnificent landscapes.

But America's families should be able to spend a day in the outdoors--within an easy drive of their homes--whether they are picnickers, hunters, fishermen or just looking for a place in the sun. They should not have to rely on the Federal Government for this, but rather on their own States and community. And not so incidentally, such State areas would take much of the pressure off our national parks which now must take the impact of millions of visitors each year, some of them with only a casual interest in their significance and unique splendor.

This will be a real challenge to our States--and one that they must meet for the benefit of their citizens. Already some States--such as New York and California--have led the way with legislative programs or studies which point the way for all.

We hope to encourage not only State programs but joint ventures between neighboring States to acquire relatively large open spaces near cities where recreation land is most needed and hardest to come by.

We are in the process of finishing an inventory of areas of great scenic beauty which should become a part of the National Park System. At the same time, we are giving a great deal of thought to whether some of these new national parks and new national seashores should not be managed as year-round recreational areas. It may well be that some areas whose beauty is fragile will serve only as living nature centers. The best management of other areas, however, may well allow more vigorous use, and be opened up to hunters, for example. We will decide in each case how to manage each area for its own best interest and for the interests of those who visit them now and in the generations to come.

I am especially eager to see that a part of the land adjoining our great rivers and streams be set aside for outdoor recreation. Such land offers unparalleled opportunities for the active enjoyment of the outdoors.

We are currently weighing various incentive programs to make it worthwhile for private landowners to open up their land to hunters, fishermen, and others. Programs of this kind are, of course, especially needed in the Northeast and Midwest where almost all land is privately owned.

And, as you know, this Administration has urged the enactment of a wilderness protection bill, similar to the one now under consideration by the Congress.

I realize that we are about to undertake a great deal and I also realize that on each particular proposal we are going to receive encouragement from some, and criticism from others. We expect to rely substantially on the findings of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission as they become available and I intend to keep in close touch with the Commission as our plans develop. We are determined to do the best we can in consultation with all who have a working interest in these matters and we are equally determined to get the job done. The land which we save now is likely all that ever can be saved, and I know that I speak for millions of Americans when I say that this generation is willing to make the sacrifices to ensure a good life for our children and grandchildren. As President Kennedy said in his Resources Message--"We cannot delude ourselves--we must understand our resources problems, and we must face up to them now. The task is large but it will be done."

x x x